

VZCZCXRO8748
PP RUEHBC RUEHDBU RUEHDE RUEHDIR RUEHKUK
DE RUEHKB #1418/01 3331009
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 291009Z NOV 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAKU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4338
INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHDIR/IRAN RPO DUBAI PRIORITY
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 001418

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/19/2017
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [IR](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: EFFORTS TO UNIFY WORLD AZERBAIJANIS CONGRESS
UNDERWAY

REF: A. BAKU 1053
[1](#)B. 06 BAKU 1424

BAKU 00001418 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Acting DCM Joan Polaschik for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: World Azerbaijanis Congress (WAC) President Ghulamriza Sabri-Tabrizi and Guney Azerbaijan Television (GunAz TV) Director Ahmad Obali reported that efforts to unify disparate WAC factions were underway, with Demokratik Dunya Azerbaijan Kongresi or DDAK (the North America-based faction of the WAC led by Obali which broke off from the WAC a number of years ago) ready to join forces with the WAC again. To consolidate this achievement and expand outreach to other Iranian ethnic minorities, Tabrizi and Obali said that a joint congress will be held on May 28, 2008, most likely in London or Brussels. While Tabrizi continues to forge ahead with efforts to unify the large variety of Azeri diaspora groups and reach out to other Iranian minority groups (ref a), former WAC President Javad Derakhti appears to be challenging this leadership, announcing in a Baku news conference that Tabrizi was not the WAC's legitimate leader and calling on members to support his (Derakhti's) efforts instead. End Summary.

Tabrizi Forges on with Unification and Outreach Efforts

[1](#)2. (C) During a November 20 meeting with Iran Watcher, World Azerbaijanis Congress (WAC) President Ghulamriza Sabri-Tabrizi and Guney Azerbaijan Television (GunAz TV) Director Ahmad Obali reported that efforts to unify the disparate factions of the WAC were well underway. According to Tabrizi and Obali, the Demokratik Dunya Azerbaijan Kongresi or DDAK (the North America-based faction of the WAC led by Obali which broke off from the WAC a number of years ago), has decided to join forces with the WAC again. Obali attributed DDAK's move to rejoin the WAC to Tabrizi's July election as WAC president and a realization that Azeri diaspora groups would likely never achieve their aims if they continued to operate independently of each other. Tabrizi and Obali also said that divisions among Azeri diaspora groups hampered outreach efforts to other Iranian minorities to include the Ahwaz, Turkmen, and Kurds. To consolidate this achievement and expand outreach to other Iranian ethnic minorities, Tabrizi and Obali said that a joint congress will be held May 28, 2008 (the 80th anniversary of the creation of the first independent Republic of Azerbaijan), most likely in either London or Brussels. Tabrizi added that initial efforts to reach out to London and Paris-based Ahwaz groups were "promising."

13. (C) Tabrizi and Obali made a strong push for the U.S. to consider supporting "independent" Azerbaijani journalists and media outlets as a way to influence public opinion in Azerbaijan and Iran. Saying that the Iraq war had done considerable damage to image of the U.S. in Azerbaijan and Iran, Tabrizi and Obali suggested that the U.S. consider ways to shape public attitudes in both countries on this and other issues such as the Iranian nuclear program, which they said was being framed as an issue of technological progress and national pride in Iran. According to Obali, since Azerbaijani television broadcasts are followed closely by ethnic Azeris in Iran (especially those of independent stations such as ANS), Obali suggested that the U.S. consider bringing independent Azerbaijani journalists to the U.S. in an effort to "better educate" them on Iran-specific issues.

14. (C) Concerning GunAz Television's efforts, Obali acknowledged that funding and staffing issues continued to hamper operations (ref b), most clearly demonstrated by the disruption of live streaming broadcasts on GunAz's website. Seemingly undeterred by these problems, Obali said that he was optimistic that 2008 was going to be a good year for GunAz. Obali reported that Hotbird was likely going to launch another satellite in the new year, which Obali said would enable Iranians to more easily follow GunAz broadcasts. According to Obali, the broadcasts would be easier for Iranian viewers to follow because the trajectory of the new satellite would be more conducive to the angles of satellite dishes mounted inside homes instead of on top of them. (Iranians are now reportedly forced to mount satellite dishes inside their homes instead of on top of them due to frequent Iranian government crackdowns on "illegal" satellite dishes.)

BAKU 00001418 002.2 OF 002

15. (C) Seeking information about the possibility of Azeri-language USG broadcasting efforts, Tabrizi and Obali urged the U.S. to pay careful attention to the content of any eventual broadcasting efforts. Pointing to VOA and Radio Farda broadcasting, Obali said that content was key because it could very easily turn off an already highly-suspicious Iranian audience. Beyond the usual criticisms of USG Persian-language broadcasting because of its "clear monarchist and nationalist agenda," Obali said that ethnic Azeris were disturbed by a recent VOA broadcast with a Kurdish guest which reportedly included the display of a map of "Kurdistan" which included all four predominantly ethnic Azeri provinces of northwestern Iran. According to Obali, this program "distressed" a great number of his ethnic Azeri viewers and contacts; he urged the U.S. to avoid this sort of programming in any future broadcasting efforts to Iran. Tabrizi and Obali made their regular push for USG funding of GunAz Television's efforts, something they believe the U.S. should strongly consider since GunAz's message is "no longer separatist."

Trouble Brewing in the WAC?

16. (C) While Tabrizi continues to forge ahead with efforts to unify the wide range of disparate Azeri diaspora groups and reach out to other Iranian minority groups, Tabrizi reported in a November 28 meeting with Iran Watcher that former WAC President Javad Derakhti had announced in a news conference following the recent Baku Turkic Brotherhood Conference that Tabrizi was not the WAC's legitimate leader and called upon members to support his (Derakhti's) efforts instead. According to Tabrizi, Government of Azerbaijan (GOAJ) forces such as Presidential Chief of Staff Ramiz Mehdiyev and State Committee for Work with Azerbaijanis Living Abroad Nazim Ibrahimov were behind this move, with Tabrizi reiterating earlier claims that Mehdiyev was clearly

under the influence of Russia and Ibrahimov motivated by business ties with Iran. According to Tabrizi, Ibrahimov and his brother are involved with a number of business ventures in Iran and Azerbaijan, most involving construction projects in Tehran and Baku. Tabrizi repeated earlier claims that he has the backing of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev and First Lady Mehriban Aliyeva.

Comment

17. (C) Tabrizi has established a track record of following through on his promises. If DDAK and its North America-based membership can be fully re-integrated into the WAC, this would not only serve to further consolidate Tabrizi's position as WAC President, but greatly enhance WAC fund raising and outreach efforts. Tabrizi appeared confident that the proposed May 28 congress will yield results yet at the same time was also visibly concerned about Derakhti's attack on his leadership role and the intense media scrutiny in Azerbaijan which followed Derakhti's press conference. It is unclear what role, if any, the Azerbaijani Government's leadership actually is playing in this intra-iaspora spat.
LU